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"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will be judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

— REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING

African Heritage Month

Special supplement inside starting on page 9

Journalism students snub "bribe" for positive HST stories

BY GINA STACK

Journalism students at the University of King's College have unanimously rejected an offer from the provincial Department of Finance to write stories about the Harmonized Sales Tax.

Communications officers for the Department of Finance recently offered journalism students 25 cents per word to write about the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). The HST is a 15 per cent sales tax that will go into effect April 1. It will replace the current federal and provincial sales taxes in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

Joe Walsh is a journalism student at King's who recently wrote an article for a local newspaper condemning the actions of the provincial government.

"They (the government) only wanted stories that had a positive slant on the HST," Walsh said.

"They felt that too many negative stories were already in the press and wanted some balanced coverage. My concern is for any journalist. You should never work anywhere where there is an agenda set."

Walsh said he was also uncomfortable with the finance department's insistence that the journalism students not identify themselves to sources as students, or say that they were being paid by the government. Instead, they were instructed to identify themselves as freelance reporters.

The articles were to be gathered and some would appear in government publications. Students were also told that they could freelance the articles to other media outlets.

Bruce Cameron, with the Department of Finance, said that he feels he has done nothing to be ashamed of.

"I used to teach at King's and I have a great respect for the students," Cameron said.

The finance department, according to Cameron, was looking for certain types of stories, but not biased stories.

"We were looking for business stories assessing the impact of the tax on business and especially in the high tech industry," he said.

"We were not looking for politics, we have a broad mandate for stories. We gave specific instructions as to how the stories were to be written, but we were not looking for propaganda. Quite frankly, I wouldn't have gone to the School of Journalism if that's what I wanted."

Tory finance critic Ron Russell disagrees.

"It's straight bribery. I am astounded, really and truly astounded," said Russell in response to the government's offer.

"It's hard to think that a responsible person would even consider that approach."

Russell said it is despicable that the government would approach journalism students because they

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Heavy breathing: Hospital incinerator an unnatural disaster

BY ADEL ISKANDAR

Complaints from local residents regarding the gusts of black soot being emitted periodically from the Victoria General Hospital's biomedical waste incinerator have uncovered crucial information concerning the incinerator's safety, reliability and maintenance.

The incinerator system at the Victoria General (VG), part of the QEII Health Sciences Centre, is composed of two identical units that alternate on a tri-weekly basis. By burning 200 tonnes per week of biomedical wastes from hospital wards on mainland Nova Scotia, the incinerator provides large volumes of steam that are then distributed all over the VG. Although operating temperatures are maintained by continuous twenty-four hour processing, the system is only supervised 16 hours a day, five days a week.

"Most of what enters the incinerator is plastic as well as chemicals and blood from the OR," said

Plant supervisor (Engineering services) David Horne. Materials to be burnt are fed into the three-level incinerator where combustion proceeds at a temperature of 858 degrees Celsius.

"[The emission of black smoke] is probably due to poor scrubbing. We usually shut down the incinerator once it is observed," replied Horne when asked about the thick and sticky emissions that are often observed leaving the incinerator stack.

Thick dark fumes are often released when the emergency stack is opened to reduce overheating in the incinerator. These fumes contain the incompletely combusted and unfiltered products from the incinerator. Many residents around the incinerator, including the neighbouring Canadian Cancer Society, visually monitor the stack and inform the incinerator employees of the appearance of such fumes.

When asked how often the

emergency stack is opened, Horne replied that it is in the range of several times a week and that not all emergency releases are recorded.

When asked if any radioactive material enters the incinerator, Horne stated that radioactive materials of negligible amounts are burnt along with all other hospital wastes.

Radioactive materials and isotopes used in medical imaging and radiotherapy are not affected by heat or combustion. Temperature does not change the nuclear structure of atoms. As a result, the radioactive material leaves the incinerator unchanged and is either emitted into the air we breathe or enters our sewage system.

Further complaints concerning the plant's compliance with government standards on dioxin/furan emissions have brought to light the fact that the monitoring of the poisonous fumes is conducted only annually at an astounding cost of \$30,000 per test.

As part of a guided tour of the incinerator on January 29, it was also noticed that the carbon monoxide/combustibles monitors were out of order. This meant that the levels of the toxic gases were not being monitored.

Another problem with the incinerator emerged three weeks ago. The 600 to 800 lbs per week of ash that remain after incineration is usually used for landfill. Recently, however, the ash has not been transported and has been accumulating at the hospital, awaiting government action.

One of the main reasons that hospitals choose to burn their wastes is the desire to destroy any

microbial components that may leave the hospital in the waste stream. This is vital in order to prevent the possibility of the material causing outside infection.

"Temperatures up to 300 degrees Celsius are more than sufficient to kill any microorganism that may enter the incinerator. Therefore, the incinerator is being overfueled to overheat," stated Dr. E. Angelopolous, Professor of Biology at Dalhousie University.

Angelopolous said that it would be cheaper to sort the materials before incineration. Autoclaving may also prove to be a cheaper, more environmentally-friendly alternative to incineration of some of the wastes.

Despite the hazards of placing such an environmentally-unfriendly device in close proximity to the VG and the IWK-Grace Maternity hospitals, what's even more worrisome is the inadequate maintenance of the incinerator and the fact that most operators are inexperienced and generally uninformed.

"I'm not sure what happens to it," replied one of the operators when asked where the water goes as it leaves the de-asher. Most employees, apart from the supervisors, require no prerequisite education or experience with incinerators prior to their employment.

A proposal to refit, renew, and maintain the VG incinerator according to government standards is already in the making. This process of refitting, if it were to proceed, would probably be under way by summer. In the meantime, there is no plan to eliminate the current danger of an "unnatural" disaster.

Thanks for the day off, George And for the \$14 million, too

George Munro was born at West River, Pictou County on November 12th, 1825. He attended the Pictou Academy for three years and learned printing in the office of the Pictou Observer. After teaching for three years at New Glasgow, Munro became an instructor of mathematics and headmaster of the Free Church Academy in Halifax.

After leaving Halifax in 1856, Munro travelled to New York. There he worked at various jobs and in 1863 Munro became a clerk in the firm of Beadle and Adams — dime novel publishers. The following year, Munro began his own publishing house and in 1867, began publication of the

Fireside Companion. This was an inexpensive family paper of entertainment and amusement which had a phenomenal circulation. The *Fireside Companion*, the *Old Sleuth Series* of 100 detective novels, and the *Seaside Library* were the three most profitable ventures for Munro.

Although Munro brought inexpensive but good reading to millions, he also hastened the passage of

Cont'd on p.3: "George"

